The Discourse on Love

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha, today is Thursday, the 18 December 1997, we are in the New Hamlet in the winter retreat. Today we are studying the Discourse on Love. In the teachings of the Buddha there are the four immeasurable minds. The first one is loving kindness, maitri in Sanskrit, mettá in Pali. The practice of love is very important.

"Those who want to attain peace should practice being upright, humble and capable of using loving speech. "If we are disturbed, we cannot have peace and we cannot have joy. Our mind is thirsty we feel we lack something. We are agitated by anger, hatred thoughts of revenge. We have no peace, no joy, we never feel happy. Even those who have a lot of material possessions and money in their bank account have no peace and joy and they are very unhappy.

Peace and joy are the two basic elements for our happiness. Peace means not to be disturbed not agitated in our mind. Those who want to attain peace have to learn the art of being straightforward. This means not to make insinuations, not go about things in a devious way. But we must use loving speech. We are straightforward, but we use loving speech. When we need something we say it frankly, but we say it with loving speech. There is a Vietnamese poet who says that if you love somebody, you have to say you love them, if you hate somebody you have to say it directly and frankly, even if someone puts a knife to your neck. So, our behavior must be straightforward, honest, clear, simple and humble. Humble means not to be sure that you are number one. Everybody must learn every day. The Buddha, even though he is The Enlightened One, learned more every day. So we have to learn to be humble.

In order to be happy, we have to learn to live simply. When you live simply, you have much more time and you can be in touch with the many wonders of life. Living simply is the criterion for the new culture, the new civilization. With the development of technology people nowadays have become more and more sophisticated and they don't live simply at all. Their joy is to go shopping. Even when we visit a new city, we cannot do anything else but go shopping. Shopping is a disease of our new civilization. The criterion for being happy is to live simply, and have a life of harmony and peace in yourself and with people around you, without aggressiveness, irritation and anger. Those who easily get angry have to learn the art of mindful breathing. When you are easily irritated you have to go back to your breath right away and take good care of your conscious breathing, calming and releasing, so that your face will not be red from anger and irritation. We must learn to know what is our limit, how much is enough. It is the opposite of wanting more and more and more. You know what is sufficient, what is enough for you.

You keep your calm; you will not be carried away by your emotions and the opinions of the majority. An advertisement says: "You must buy that", and then everybody goes out to buy it. When someone says: "that man needs to be beaten", then people can be carried away by the emotions of the majority.

In French literature there is a story about a man who wanted to revenge a cheap merchant. The man, on a trip across the sea, bought a sheep from the merchant and threw that sheep into the sea. All the other sheep of the merchant followed the first sheep into the sea, and the merchant lost everything. We are all like those sheep. We are easily carried away, like the crews who see one ship going into the ocean so they all go into the ocean. Everybody gets angry, so you get angry. Everybody gets excited, so you get excited. We are usually carried away

by the big group. We have to be master of the situation in order not to be carried away by the majority.

The Buddha said that we should not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones. He didn't say let us not do anything that will be disapproved by the high monks or by the arahats. He said the wise ones, because he knew that outside of his Sangha there were many wise persons, in other spiritual traditions.

"May everyone be happy and safe and may their heart be filled with joy." Our first wish is that everyone will be happy and safe. Safe means that you have no accident, there is no natural disaster, no catastrophe, no fire, no robbery, no war and no accident, and you are not attacked by people who want to rob or kill you. Everybody wants to be safe, so we wish that everybody will be safe, not only ourselves. When we go on the airplane we put on the safety belt and we wish that everyone will be safe.

In the Vietnamese text there is a very beautiful word, a compound word meaning very stable. The first word means kind and the second word means very thick. If you say somebody is not very thick, it means sometimes he is good and sometimes he’s not. But if you say somebody is thick, it means the person is good and has a lot of stability. People in Vietnam used to say that the Earth is very thick, and when praising someone who is very stable and solid they would say he is very thick like the earth. We have a high monk in Vietnam with this word in his name. When somebody has a lot of virtue and stability then they say this person has a lot of thickness. If they say someone is thin, it means that person will easily betray you. But if somebody is thick it is very good. We also say: "I take care of you thickly". Thickly in this sense means very deeply, profoundly. Ksitigarbha is a bodhisattva representing the earth. And before the sutra on Ksitigarbha, there is a gatha, which speaks of the earth-like qualities of Ksitigarbha, and the words thickness and stability are repeated several times.

"May all living beings live in security and peace". To be free means you are not attached by anything. There are those who work but who are too attached to the work, are not free from the work. In English they’re called workaholics. So, we work very well but we are not workaholics, we are not attached, caught by the work. May all living beings live in security and peace. This is not action yet; it's just wishful thinking. But when the wishful thinking is great, it will bring us to the real action. If you do not wish to become a monk or nun then you will never become a monk or nun. You have to wish more than 100 percent that you will become a monk or a nun. So the wishful thinking is a very important energy to lead you to an action. We wish that all can live peacefully on earth; we wish that there is peace in our hearts. We wish it to be safe for ourselves, but we also wish that those around us will be safe, and also those who are far away. Not only that human beings but that animals, plants, the earth, the air, the mountains, the rivers, the ocean will be safe, that your environment will be safe, as will the environment of other humans, living beings, vegetation and minerals.

"Those who are frail, those who are strong." When we are frail we are easily overcome. But when we are strong we also can be overcome. When you live in the forest, even though you are stronger than the rabbit there are always other animals who are stronger than you. And the strong animal could be overcome by a stronger animal. And strong animals also can be killed by small animals. In the sutra, the Buddha used to say that lions can be killed by parasites, the little living beings in his own body. That is to say that nobody can destroy us except ourselves. When we are mindful we can see that there are many little habit energies in us that can kill us more readily than people outside ourselves. So the small things like doubt, fear, jealousy, anger are more likely to kill you than is the lion outside.

"Those who are tall, short, big, small, visible, not visible." Two thousand six hundred years ago the Buddha already saw that there are invisible living beings. Now we know about bacteria, viruses, but at that time he saw already. "Visible or not visible, near or far away, already-born or yet-to-be-born, may all of them dwell in perfect tranquility."

"Let no one do harm to anyone, let no one put the life of anyone in danger." We don't want any species to kill other species, we don't want any species to despise the life of another species and destroy the life of another species. When we read that sentence and we look deeply, we may discover a lot. You have to read the sutra with your serene mind and then you can discover many things that in the past you thought you understood but now you see that you did not. You see that the lion kills the deer, to eat. We cannot tell the lion not to kill. The lion is a carnivore and the lion must eat meat. But the lion only catches a deer when he is hungry. And when he is finished he leaves the remains for other carnivores to eat, like the wild dogs. But human beings don't need to kill, they are not hungry. But they still go hunting and kill deer and rabbits. In the past humans sometimes did not have enough plants and they had to kill some animals to eat, but only when they needed to. Nowadays, there is plenty of food in

the market, but many people still go hunting. Every time I hear the noise of the hunting, I feel a lot of pain in my heart. How can people be so cruel to each other and to other living beings? They are not hungry. Our life is so precious. But the life of other species is also precious. The lives of other species are precious not only for them but for humans too. When we kill the other species, then we put ourselves in danger too.

During the war in Vietnam we can see that the generals of the US Army are not taught to respect life. They just kill everyone. They are not taught to save as many lives as possible. When you sit on the plane and you drop a bomb you kill a number of soldiers, but you also kill a lot of civilians. The United States is a very rich country and they have a lot of bombs. But they don't know anything about what happens underneath. They never see deeply what happens down there when the bomb explodes. There are children who were just born; there are children only three years old. Not only are they killed but they are handicapped because of these bombs, and they suffer all their life. When I say this I do not say that only Americans are bad, but the other side also did not respect life. During the war a lot of civilians died. And people always pay attention to the success of the battle, they never think of how many people die, how many innocent civilians die. And they don't care much about the minds of people, their unhappiness. The US Government did everything possible to protect the lives of American soldiers, but the American Government never paid attention to the lives of the Vietnamese soldiers on either side. Those who have gone through the war in Vietnam see very clearly that only the American soldiers' lives were protected, but Vietnamese soldiers lives' on both sides were not protected at all, and they didn't care at all for the lives of civilian people. So the life of the nationalists, the Vietnamese soldiers on the pro-American-side, they were also not protected at all. And the lives of the civilians are nothing.

"May no one do harm to anyone, let no one put the life of anyone in danger." When we are angry, we have the tendency to punish in order to feel less angry. We always have that tendency, that when we are angry, when we suffer, we want the other person to suffer too, we want to punish the other person. We think that the more the other person suffers, the more we will be happy, or at least we will feel less unhappy. So the Buddha taught that when you are angry, you look deeply to see that you are suffering. When you are angry you are suffering. And when you are suffering learn not to let other persons suffer; learn to transform our tendency to punish into the tendency to forgive. We suffer already don't let other people suffer.

"Let no-one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one out of anger or ill-will wish anyone any harm." Here is the teaching of the Buddha about one of the fifty-one states of our mind. This is ahimsa, "no harming". Of course, we can struggle. Buddhism does not ask you not to struggle. But you struggle with the energy of love, not with the energy of anger. You have to have the wish to reach the aim that you struggle for, like for example the liberation of the country. But you can use the energy of love, of understanding. Don't use the energy of anger. Because if you use anger there is confusion. And with confusion and ignorance you can do much damage, and then we have to retreat, and it causes a lot of suffering.

Now the Buddha teaches us how to take action. "Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos." The mother always gives a lot of care to her baby. She carries it nine months in her womb, she gives birth to her child, and she takes good care of her child. So "just like a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love". So we learn to cultivate boundless love for the person who sits next to us on our left, on our right. How can we learn to love the person on our left like our only child? How can we learn to love the person on our right like our only child, and at the risk of our own life? And we have that love also for our father, our mother, our sister, our brother, and our neighbor.

When the baby is just conceived in the womb of the mother, the baby is small like a little bean. At that time, the baby and the mother are one. The baby grows and grows and the baby is still one with the mother. When the baby is really big in the womb of the mother they are still linked by the umbilical cord, and everything the mother eats, drinks, thinks, will enter into the womb and into the mind of the baby. When the mother suffers the baby suffers, when the mother is joyful the baby is joyful, if the mother is mindful the baby is mindful. If you have no chance to have a baby then your baby is the baby Buddha in you. Don't think that only women can have a baby, men also have a baby. The baby Buddha in us needs to be protected. When the baby is big enough to be born people use a scissors to cut the umbilical cord. We don't see the umbilical cord anymore but we can still see that the mother and the child are very linked. The view that you and the baby are one is correct. But if you hold your baby and force it to be exactly like you, this is not correct either. It's good that you are one with your baby. But the baby receives other influences as well, and especially when the baby grows up she or he could have new insights. Every mother has to learn to train herself to see that your baby, your child is at the same time you but different from you. She or

he has his or her own life. You cannot imprison your child and make them go in your direction and force him or her to do what you like because you want to shape her or him in your mould. That is not correct. Because they are not only the continuation of you, but they are the continuation of many generations of ancestors before you, and perhaps during your time you had no chance to water the good seeds you inherited, and so you don't have the same chance as your child. And when he or she has a lot of new insights, you have to learn from her or from him.

We have to learn to see that we are one with our brother, our sister, our child, our son, and our daughter. Of course, when we see like that then we love everyone. Then we learn to know that those who are not linked to us by an umbilical cord are also deeply linked to us; we see this when we look deeply. And we also need to train ourselves to see that others are us. In the past we praised the king and said he was a very great king because he loves all his citizens as his own sons or daughters. This is a Vietnamese proverb, that "a good king is a king who loves every citizen like his own baby." Literally it says "like the child who is still red", that is who is just born. You take good care of your citizens as if they were your own children. So if you are the king your duty is to bring happiness to all the people in your nation. That truth is not only in Buddhism, but is a deep insight that belongs to many other religions too.

"Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos." This sentence only has meaning if we know how to put it in our daily activities. Everybody would like to love people in that way. But how can you love everyone like you love your own child? According to me, love is the most precious thing in life. There is one thing that has some meaning and that is love. In the Samyukta Nikáya in the Pali Canon the Buddha said the practice of love is the most beautiful thing. In the Agamas, the Chinese Canon, it says practicing love is the purest thing. I think that is an incorrect translation. Because for me practicing maitri is practicing beauty. In order to love properly you have to understand the other person. You cannot claim to love somebody if you don't understand him or her. If somebody has no love at all that person will be a very lonely person. We look around us; we see those who suffer a lot, that is those who have no love at all. She doesn't love herself she doesn't love others. He doesn't love himself he cannot love anyone. Such a person is the most unhappy person on earth. But if you see in yourself a lot of love, you want to love that tree, that flower, the earth, that girl, that boy, that man, that women, then you feel that you are the happiest person on earth.

When you make another person smile, you do something to make another person feel relief, then suddenly you feel very happy. If you do not have a chance to do something to relieve someone else but you have the will to be able to relieve him or her, already that good will is making you happier. Someone who does not have the energy of love, who do not have any will to love, that person is very lost, very lonely and very unhappy. For them this loneliness is like hell, and they feel lost, miserable. So we have to learn to know that loving is a means to help us to make a link between ourselves and other people and other species around us. And we see that we and they are linked deeply by one thing, and that is life. And when we feel that we are one, linked by that deep ocean of life, then we won't have any desire to punish the other person. If you feel hurt by another person try to look deeply at what is behind her mistake, her shortcoming, his un-skillfulness. When we try to understand in that way then we feel free from hurt.

Love is the most beautiful thing in this life. And love helps us to have an open mind and to understand better. Love is the most beautiful gift. Our mindfulness is like a mirror. The mirror reflects our body and our mind. In the early morning when you wake up, you look at the mirror and you see your body, and you smile so that your face looks more relaxed. The most beautiful thing of life is love, and an open mind, large view. Try to be open, to listen and to understand more deeply. Those are the most beautiful things of life: understanding, an open mind, to listen and to understand more deeply. We look at things with an open mind, with attention and with a compassionate view. So I advise you in the early morning when you wake up to look in the mirror and smile. Smile to your face, smile to life. And also learn to love yourself and love people around you with an open mind, with deep listening and deep understanding. So you look at somebody with forgiveness, with inclusiveness, but not in observation and discrimination. Look like a mother looks on her fragile little baby.

If you want to practice diligently you must keep a little booklet in your pocket and write notes. Every day that has been offered to you is a very precious day. In Plum Village I know that a number of you have had to abandon everything in order to come here, either for one year, six months, three months or one, five or seven days. That means a lot of preparation. So one day is a lot if you practice properly. So when you have one day of mindfulness you have to organize properly. When we organize a day of mindfulness we have to prepare beautifully: who will take care of walking meditation, who will take care of guided meditation, who will take care of the silent meal, of Touching the Earth etc. You organize a day of mindfulness like that, so why don't you organize yourself, organize

your days. When you come here for one day, you must organize it in such a way that every minute of the day will be very precious. Don't let the days drift away in forgetfulness. In the early morning, when you do sitting meditation, why don't you use that time to look deeply in order to see that: "I decided to make this day wonderful, I decided to make this very day a great gift for my life and for the life of others around me." Why, when we do sitting meditation do we just sit and wait for the bell to ring in order to announce the ending of sitting meditation. That is a waste. So, sitting meditation time is to look deeply, to prepare how we can make our day wonderful. In the sitting meditation time during the first period you practice calming, and during the second period you should look deeply to make your day beautiful, the happiest day of your life, and the happiest day for the person next to you and those around you.

"We must bring our boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. We should let our boundless love permeate the whole universe." Your love can be developed infinitely in different directions. There are some things that can only expand to a certain limit, but your love can expand indefinitely, boundlessly. You should let your boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below and across." When the other person betrays you, when the other person destroys you, when the other person is cruel to you that will not shake you that will not reduce your love. That is true love. If you can love the person who hates you, if you can love the person who destroys your life, that is the love of a great being. But if you only love those who are very loveable, that is not difficult. That is enjoyable, it is not a real practice of love. If you can love the person who is despicable, that is real love, that is a training.

If a certain person behaves in such a way it is because they have had less chance than you. They may have listened to a talk of Thay, but they have not had other favourable conditions you had in your background. That is the reason why you can love them even if they are not a loveable person.

"Our love will know no obstacle." In order to be able to expand our love like that, we need to practice deep looking. Because without practising deep looking, you cannot love easily. The Buddha said that only love can answer hatred. Because if you answer hatred with hatred, the hatred will increase and will destroy not only yourself and the other person but also the whole universe. So only love can answer hatred. "Our love will know no obstacle. Our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity."

"Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living." We have to cultivate mindfulness of love the whole daylong. When you walk, it is for love. When you sit, it is for love. When you are lying down, it is for love. When you work, it is for love. When you do everything it is for expressing love, it is motivated by love. When you walk, you sit, you are lying down, you work, all are for expressing your love. When you ask the baby to eat and it doesn’t want to, you say: "Please, eat one spoonful for mummy, one spoonful for daddy, one spoonful for your sister." You love yourself, your Sangha body, your spiritual path, your teacher, and that is why every act you do is for expressing love.

The mindfulness of love is the presence of love everywhere, every moment of your days. When you are mindful of your love, you can enter slowly into love concentration. Love concentration is everywhere, and your address, your zip code is love: maitri, karuna, Mudita, and upeksa. Maitri means giving joy, karuna is removing suffering, Mudita is feeling joy and upeksa is loving without discrimination, like the right hand loves the left hand. If you cultivate that concentration all day long: when you walk, when you sit, when you eat, when you work, then you are living in the deep concentration of love. It’s called maitri concentration, and you can dwell in maitri concentration all day long. "This is the noblest way of living." And thanks to this you will be "free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desire. And you live in beauty and you realize perfect understanding. That perfect understanding is that you are a Buddha. When you cultivate deep concentration of love you are free from wrong views and you will listen to even the most difficult people very carefully, and try to understand them deeply, their difficulties, their environment, their childhood, and when you do like that, you will arrive at the great understanding that is the perfect understanding of an enlightened one. "Those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death."

The next chant is: We Are Truly Present. "We are truly present, our heart established in mindfulness." When you spend half an hour chanting you dwell peacefully, mindfully in every word. These words are only words of the wise ones, so your mind and your heart are totally with the wisdom of the words. You have already practiced sitting meditation, walking meditation in the meditation hall, and you have recited the sutra. Kinh hanh is slow walking meditation in the meditation hall. Kinh means weaving, stringing together and every step is like one thread. In the past when we bound the sutra, we used a needle and thread to go through each sheet to keep them together.

So kinh means the thread, which weaves all our steps into oneness. Kinh hanh means using the threads of our conscious breath to go through every one of your steps and bring our steps into oneness. Kinh means taking a thread and putting every sheet together, or all the beads together. When you have a necklace of pearls you need a thread to go through every pearl in order to make a necklace. The thread is kinh. Kinh hanh means you use your mindful breath to go through each of your steps. It’s difficult to translate. Kinh hanh means you walk mindfully and slowly in the meditation hall. When you walk one hundred steps, you have one hundred mindful steps. If you walk mindfully then your thread will go through every sheet, but if you walk with your mind on different things in different directions, your thread will be broken and the sheets will go in different directions. So if one of your steps is stepping into the world of suffering, anger, jealousy, that pearl will not go onto your thread to make the beautiful necklace.

"We are truly present, our hearts established in mindfulness for sitting meditation, kinh hanh, and reciting the sutra. May the three jewels and the holy nagas support this meditation center." When you say Namo But Thich Ca Mau Ni or Namo Bo Tat Quan The Am it means you evoke the name of Avalokitesvara or Gautama Buddha, and you see that you walk with the feet of Gautama Buddha or Avalokitesvara.

This is the practice of recollection of the Buddha, evoking the name of the Buddha, or evoking the name of the Dharma or the Sangha. During the time we practice silent kinh hanh, or we practice kinh hanh while evoking the name of the Buddha, we weave our steps with the evocation of the image of the Buddha in us, or the image of being peaceful at every step. We know what the sutra says, but we still recite it again because it is not a matter of obtaining more knowledge but a matter of practicing, training ourselves to live the words of these phrases. We already know these gathas we know every word. But when you recite again, you look deep and you may discover many things that the first recitation does not enable you to see. You have to recite with your deep look. But if your mind goes in ten thousand directions, even if your words are recited beautifully it won't help.

Maybe you have recited that sutra for the last ten years but you haven’t understood the meaning. But suddenly one night when you recite the words a great world opens in front of you and you discover many beauties. Every time you recite a sutra like that, it’s like a sword that can cut through your ignorance. A sword can cut your ignorance every day. Maybe today you think that this is one recitation like many other recitations. But you never know, your concentration may be deep and suddenly some word of the chanting goes deep into you and you get a deep insight. So you can be enlightened during recitation of the sutra, too.

"May the three jewels", the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha in you. Buddha is also the historical Buddha. Dharma is the methods that help you to transform your habit energy, and Sangha is those around you. The Vietnamese version also mentions the Holy Spirit that helps you, because we believe that when you practice many holy spirits come together with your spirit to make things much better. Good energy attracts good energy. "May the three jewels and the Holy Spirit support this meditation center with its four Sanghas, protect them and support them". I think that the English text has to be translated by Holy Spirit more than Naga. Naga doesn’t have any meaning for people. And Naga sometimes means snake. For Indians the holy snake is very beautiful, but for Western friends snake is a very bad sign. So we must translate it as the Holy Spirit. The four Sanghas are the Sangha of monks, the Sangha of nuns, the Sangha of laymen and the Sangha of laywomen.

We may think that there were three different jewels. But in fact the three jewels are one. We cannot divide them. There is the Buddha. But how can we have the Buddha if we don't have the Dharma, the methods to practice in order to make your Buddha become bigger and bigger every day. And how can you make your Buddha become bigger every day without the Sangha? So Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are one.

The Buddha said that there are six domains. The domain of spirit, the domain of attula, that is those who are very angry, the domain of beasts, the domain of hungry ghosts, the domain of those who live in hell, and the domain of humans. So when you recite the sutra you think that you recite for yourself, but maybe there are holy spirits who are coming and listening to you, and also attula and hungry ghosts too. So you have to recite properly, with dignity, with beauty. If you don't recite, don't do it. But if you do recite, do it with beauty, correctly, like you are a human who is reciting for all the six domains. And there are other living beings who come listening to this chanting, please support and protect them. When you read to this point, you must see the presence of six realms that are around us, even though they are not visible to our eyes, they listen to us, observe us and learn with us. If we do something wrong we can hide it from some of our brothers and sisters in the Dharma, but we cannot hide from all the six realms around us who are trying to practice with us too.

"Protect us from the eight misfortunes." The eight misfortunes are situations in which the dharma is not available. The first one is hell. In hell nobody gives you a dharma talk. When you are a hungry ghost, you cannot easily receive the dharma. The third one is the realm of animals. The fourth is the deva realm, where living beings enjoy a lot of sensual pleasures. The fifth is a place very far away, remote, where the Dharma has difficulty to reach. The sixth is to be in a situation of misfortune where you cannot learn the Dharma. For example when you are deaf, when you cannot speak, when you are heavily handicapped, when you are blind, you cannot see the sutras, you cannot see the Dharma in that situation. The seventh is a place where people are very eloquent. There are monks who live peacefully, behave simply, have beautiful behavior, and he are "spiritual teachers" but although they speak eloquently it’s very intellectual or like an eloquent lawyer. He can say something that is wrong and make it sound right. Among you there are those who have the seeds of eloquence. Be very careful.

Also there is misfortune like oppression, fire, flooding, and disaster these are un-favorable conditions for a practitioner. It's strange that the fifth accident is humans. Some humans are very naughty and try to prevent you from practicing the beautiful path. And there are those who are not human who also cause difficulties for you. Harmful bacteria, parasites, poisonous insects, small living beings who can kill you, who can cause difficulty to your practice. The eighth one is the government opposing you. And disease too. And the three paths are the three obscure paths: hell, hungry ghost and animal. You have to see that in each of us we have these three paths, and we also have the six realms in us. Don't think that these six kinds of living being are outside of you that the three paths are outside of you. They are in you. Only with mindfulness can you observe and you will transform.

The four objects of gratitude, four things that we feel grateful for are: parents and ancestors, teachers, friends and living beings. In the Vietnamese text it says, "impregnate with divine grace, heavenly grace." The three worlds are the world of desire, the world of form and the world of no-form.

"May there be no place in the world at war. May the winds be favorable, the rains seasonable and the people’s hearts at peace. May the practice of the Sangha be steady and diligent, ascending the ten Bhumis without hardship." The ten Bhumis are the ten stages for becoming a bodhisattva. "May the Sangha-kaya live in peace and joy." The Maha-Sangha practices diligently. Maha-Sangha can mean five or six persons, and it means something like noble, great practice. A person who practices to be a bodhisattva has to go through ten Bhumis, ten stages.

The first one is the stage of joy, Mudita. The sign that you are on the way to become a bodhisattva is that you have a lot of joy. Looking at your face, at your behavior, people know that you have a lot of joy. That is one sign that you are a bodhisattva.

The second stage is purity. It means to be far away from all that is impure. All the impurities in your mind and your body are already transformed. When you look at your negative energies and you are able to transform them then you are entering into the second stage of a bodhisattva. You are distanced from the negative energy in you. If you can get away from the negative energies, it is thanks to the practice of the five mindfulness trainings, the fine manners and the precepts.

Then you arrive at the third stage that is emanating light. When you keep the mindfulness trainings properly and your mind is far away from all the negative energies, then you emanate a lot of light, freshness, solidity and freedom. People see that you have a lot of joy. When you see someone who practices mindfulness really beautifully it is as though that person is emanating light.

At the fourth stage your insight, your wisdom starts to be enlightened. Your deep vision, your deep insight starts to be illuminated and it makes all your ignorance, confusion, negative desires, cravings disappear. The Venerable Master Tang Hoi used to say: "Zen means burning all your afflictions."

Now we arrive to the fifth stage, winning against all difficulties. In your path there are always difficulties, but you can transcend all these difficulties, the difficulties, which are inside and those, which are outside. If you have difficulties, you don't care. Some difficulties are caused by your parents, your friends, and the negative situation of your body, your health. You transcend all you overcome all. Every time a difficulty arises, you overcome it.

The sixth stage is dwelling deeply in the present moment, one hundred percent in the present moment. You see the pure land in you and around you, and at the same time you see all the difficulties of life. But you are not shaken by them. You know that is life. You look deeply and gently, you try to overcome and transform it to the best of your ability.

The seventh stage is you go very far in the direction of saving people. After being in practice for a few weeks, we might think, "I know everything, breathing in, breathing out, walking in mindfulness, that I know, that's enough. So I don't need to go far." But we want to go far, we don't feel satisfied with just a bit of learning and practice."

The eighth bhumi is immobility. This means very deep stability. You are very stable; you are not shaken by anything. Even an earthquake will not shake you. Any big afflictions cannot affect you. Any craving, attraction cannot shake you. You arrive at a stage where nothing can shake you: anger, money, temptation of sex or fame, nothing can shake you, nothing can tempt you.

When you arrive at the ninth stage you are totally master of your mind. You act, you speak, you do everything in an effortless, beautiful way. When you open your mouth, it's only beautiful speech, when you act, its only beautiful action. When you do everything, it is always naturally in a beautiful way.

And then you arrive at the tenth stage, the Dharma cloud stage. You are free like a cloud. Wherever you are joyful, you stop. When there are some difficulties, you transform. When something tempts you, you will not be tempted. It's very easy, you become like a cloud, not a normal cloud carried away by the wind, but a Dharma cloud.

"May the Sangha-kaya lives in peace, joy and harmony." The word Sangha-kaya is mostly used only in Plum village. The sutras speak a lot about Buddha-kaya and Dharmakaya, but rarely about Sangha-kaya. I believe that Sangha-kaya is the best way to learn how to transcend our egocentricity, our tendency to be so sure of ourselves, and to practice the non-self training. Because if you live with the Sangha you see the wisdom that your sister in the Dharma is yourself, your brother in the Dharma is yourself. You see the lovely sister is yourself, you see the difficult brother is yourself and you practice to live in the Sangha.

You practice so that your Buddha-kaya, your Dharmakaya will be great every day. Kaya means body, Buddha-kaya is the body of the Buddha. Dharmakaya means body of the Dharma. The teaching will be great every day. Sangha-kaya, the body of the Sangha will be great every day. "May the Sangha-kaya live in peace, joy and harmony, the refuges and the precepts bringing happiness and wisdom." We need to live so that our Sangha-kaya will be fresh and new and joyful every day, so that everyone around us can take refuge properly in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha in themselves and practice the precepts properly to bring happiness and wisdom to themselves and those around.

In Buddhism we say that we try to practice two things, punya and prajña. Punya means you practice to obtain merit. And prajña means you practice to gain understanding. When you clean the house for the community, you garden a lot, you wash the dishes, you do a lot of hard work for the Sangha, you do merit work, punya. But if you do that work and are not carried away by your thinking, dwelling peacefully in the present moment one hundred percent, you obtain at the same time great understanding. So when we work or we help the hungry children, we obtain some merit, but if we do that work in order for great understanding to come and embrace everyone then that merit will be very great.

You practice everything with punya and prajña at the same time. When you clean the house, you do it not for cleaning the house but to practice to cultivate your concentration, to live deeply in the present moment, to be deeply present in every act. We call that practicing merit and understanding together. And the more we do it, the greater our merit. So while you are helping the Sangha by cleaning the house, doing the gardening, cutting the wood, shopping, cooking, this is only merit work, and merit work is very little. But if you do it with mindfulness, you live deeply the present moment, you are not carried away by anger, hatred, and dispersion then you practice prajña at the same time. Enlightenment work and merit work must go together and nothing can shake you.

"The wisdom of awakened mind shines like the full moon." We practice so that we will be the mind and body of the Buddha. "The mind of the Buddha is always clear like the full moon. The body of a Buddha is pure like crystal. The Buddha living in the world always tries to save others. Wherever there is the mind of the Buddha there is compassion and love. Namo Shakyamuni Buddha." Our respect to Gautama Buddha. Muni is monk; Sakya is the family name of Gautama Buddha. Shakyamuni is the monk Sakya. If you visit my hermitage, you'll see a bowl made of clay. It was offered to me in India by a monk who also has the family name Sakya. (The bowl is in the Upper Hamlet now.) Ten years ago I visited Lumbini, the place where the Buddha was born and I met with this monk who has the same family name, Sakya, as Gautama Buddha. He appeared and he said: "I heard that you were coming. I've been waiting for you for several days already, to give you this bowl." And he gave me this bowl of clay and a sanghati. I don't know why. I arrived silently; there was no advertisement of my coming to Lumbini at

all. We came like an unknown group of people making a pilgrimage. But when we arrived, that monk said: "I've been waiting for you and I offer you this bowl and this sanghati robe."

When you want to show respect to a Buddha statue or a shrine, according to the tradition in India, when you put your sanghati on you have the right shoulder bare, free and then you walk around the Buddha and you have to go in a clockwise direction with that shoulder facing inward. If you go in the wrong direction they know that you don't know Buddhist tradition. You walk mindfully around the Buddha. According to Vietnamese tradition, you join the palms when you walk in kinh hanh, (slow walking meditation), but in the West you may join your palms if you wish, but it's okay not to. But when you evoke the name of the Buddha or Avalokitesvara, you have to join the palms. We try to do it that way to show our respect. To show your respect is to practice merit, but when you walk mindfully without letting your mind go in ten directions you also practice enlightenment. And merit and enlightenment work must go together.